

To: The Democratic National Committee  
Re: 2016 GOP presidential candidates  
Date: May 26, 2015

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Below, please find a suggested strategy for positioning and public messaging around the 2016 Republican presidential field. Ultimately, we need to

## **Our Goals & Strategy**

Our goals in the coming months will be to frame the Republican field and the eventual nominee early and to provide a contrast between the GOP field and HRC. Over the long-term, these efforts will be aimed at getting us the best match-up in the general election, and weakening the eventual nominee through the course of the primary. We have outlined three strategies to obtain our goal:

- 1) Highlight when GOP candidates are outside of the mainstream on key issues, ideally driving the rest of the field to follow with positions that will hurt them in a general election;
- 2) Damage Republican presidential candidates' credibility with voters by looking for targeted opportunities to undermine their specific messaging;
- 3) Use specific hits to muddy the waters around ethics, transparency and campaign finance attacks on HRC

## **Operationalizing the Strategy**

### *Highlighting Extreme or Unpopular Positions*

There are two ways to approach the strategies mentioned above. The first is to use the field as a whole to inflict damage on itself similar to what happened to Mitt Romney in 2012. The variety and volume of candidates is a positive here, and many of the lesser known can serve as a cudgel to move the more established candidates further to the right. In this scenario, we don't want to marginalize the more extreme candidates, but make them more "Pied Piper" candidates who actually represent the mainstream of the Republican Party. In these issues, we would elevate statements and policies from any candidate—including second and third-tier candidates—on issues that will make them seem too far to the right on social issues and too far from the priorities of everyday Americans on economic issues.

### *Undermining Their Message & Credibility, Based on our General Election Priorities*

In addition to pinning down the field on key issues, we will work to undermine the Republican candidate's specific messaging, while keeping in mind which candidates and which messages we believe are most powerful. These messages and the responses to them will change given new campaign positioning and new learnings from polling and research, but on these issues, we will keep the focus on the most likely candidates to allow some possibility for growth with the weaker candidates.

- Jeb Bush
  - What to undermine: the notion he is a "moderate" or concerned about regular Americans; perceived inroads with the Latino population.
- Marco Rubio

- o What to undermine: the idea he has “fresh” ideas; his perceived appeal to Latinos and younger voters
- Scott Walker
  - o What to undermine: his Wisconsin record, particularly on jobs; the idea he can rally working- and middle class Americans.
- Rand Paul
  - o What to undermine: the idea he is a “different” kind of Republican; his stance on the military and his appeal to millennials and communities of color.
- Chris Christie
  - o What to undermine: his success as governor, his hypocrisy in telling it like it is vs. his ethical issues and acts of a typical politician.

### *Muddying the Waters*

As we all know, the right wing attack machine has been building its opposition research on Hillary Clinton for decades. HRC’s critics have been telegraphing they are ready to attack and do so with reckless abandon. While reporters have much less of an appetite for ethics stories about GOP candidates, we will utilize the research to place highly targeted hits—for example, GOP candidates taking positions supported by their major super PAC donors.

### **Tactics**

Working with the DNC and allied groups, we will use several different methods to land these attacks, including:

- **Reporter Outreach:** Working through the DNC and others, we should use background briefings, prep with reporters for interviews with GOP candidates, off-the-record conversations and oppo pitches to help pitch stories with no fingerprints and utilize reporters to drive a message.
- **Releases and Social Media:** Where appropriate these attacks can be leveraged for more public release, particularly the attacks around specific issues where a public release can point out that Republicans are outside of the mainstream.
- **Bracketing Events:** Both the DNC and outside groups are looking to do events and press surrounding Republican events to insert our messaging into their press and to force them to answer questions around key issues.

We look forward to discussing this strategy further. Our goal is to use this conversation to answer the questions who do we want to run against and how best to leverage other candidates to maneuver them into the right place.